

result of the culture of service that is arising around us. I proposed and started the USA Freedom Corps to encourage people from all walks of life, all across America, to extend a compassionate hand to neighbors in need. And the response has been strong. Our faith-based charities across America are also strong, and they're vibrant, bringing hope and healing to our fellow Americans. Policemen and firefighters, people who wear our Nation's uniform are reminding us what it means to sacrifice for something greater than yourself. And once again, the children of America believe in heroes because they see them every day.

In these challenging times, the world has seen America's resolve and courage. And I have been privileged to see the compassion and the character of the American people. All the tests of the last 2½ years have come to the right nation. We're a

strong country, and we will use that strength to defend the peace. We're an optimistic country. We're confident in ourselves, and we're confident in ideals bigger than ourselves. We seek to lift whole nations by spreading freedom. And at home, we seek to lift up lives by spreading opportunity to every corner, to every person of this great country.

This is the work that history has set before us. We welcome it, and we know that for our country, better days lie ahead.

May God bless you, and may God continue to bless America. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:46 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton. In his remarks, he referred to his brother, Marvin Bush, and sister, Dorothy Bush Koch; and Republican National Committee chairman Marc Racicot.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters *June 18, 2003*

Medicare Reform

The President. I want to thank the Members of the United States Senate for coming to discuss the issue of Medicare. I want to congratulate Leader Frist as well as Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Baucus for really fine work on the Finance Committee to get a important piece of legislation moving. We're committed to reforming the Medicare system so America's seniors get the health care they need.

These Senators around the table have worked together to see that we get a good plan. I asked them to come so I can figure out ways that our administration can continue to help the process move forward. The work has been really strong thus far. And I want to congratulate you all for fine leadership. Welcome to the White House.

I'll answer a couple of questions. Scott [Scott Lindlaw, Associated Press].

United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair

Q. Mr. President, Tony Blair is in a bit of trouble at home. He's got a couple of ex-Cabinet officials contending he may have exaggerated information on weapons of mass destruction. He stood by you. Do you plan on saying anything to back him up at home?

The President. Yes, I'll say something right now: He operated on very sound intelligence, and those accusations are simply not true.

Iran

Q. Mr. President?

The President. Yes.

Q. Are you hoping the protesters in Iran will topple the Iranian Government? And now that the IAEA report is out, how are you going to stop them from getting a nuclear weapon?

The President. Well, the international community must come together to make it very clear to Iran that we will not tolerate the construction of a nuclear weapon. Iran would be dangerous if they have a nuclear weapon. I brought this subject up in the G-8; we had a good discussion on the subject with near universal agreement that we all must work together to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

And secondly, I appreciate those courageous souls who speak out for freedom in Iran. They need to know America stands squarely by their side. And I would urge the Iranian administration to treat them with the utmost of respect.

Stretch [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News].

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, do you plan to send Dr. Rice to the Middle East soon, particularly given the situation——

The President. I'll let you know when we decide to do so. We, of course, have got Ambassador Wolf in the region now, and he's working hard with both parties. And I called President Mubarak today to ask him to work with the Palestinian Authority to consolidate their security forces under Prime Minister Abbas so that the Prime Minister can achieve the goals that he set out, which is for the dismantlement of terror and what hopefully will be a peaceful Palestinian state.

Thank you all.

Q. You do anticipate sending——

The President. I said, I'll let you know when we send her.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:23 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation John S. Wolf; President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; and Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Estate Tax Legislation June 18, 2003

I commend the House of Representatives for acting to permanently eliminate the death tax. The death tax results in unfair double taxation of income and it hurts America's small businesses, which are the engine of job creation. Today's vote is a victory for fairness, job creation, and

certainty for family businesses, farmers, and ranchers.

Permanently eliminating the death tax is an important step toward increasing fairness in the Tax Code and promoting economic security. I urge the Senate to act on this important matter so that we can eliminate this unfair tax once and for all.